

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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O 141350Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T BEIRUT 1343

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, LE, IS
SUBJECT: ISRAELI REACTION TO TERRORIST RAID: CONVERSATION WITH
FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS

REF: (A) BEIRUT 1322, (B) BEIRUT 1303

1. CALLED ON FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS AT 12 LOCAL MARCH 14
AT HIS REQUEST TO DISCUSS SITUATION ARISING FROM FATAH
TERRORIST OPERATION ON SATURDAY. REVIEWED WITH HIM INFORMATION
WE HAD RECEIVED FROM ISRAELIS REGARDING DETAILS OF OPERATION.
HE THOUGHT IT UNLIKELY, AND I AM INCLINED TO AGREE, THAT GROUP
ACTUALLY STARTED OUT BY BOAT FROM BEIRUT. FOR ONE THING,
BEIRUT PORT IS CONTROLLED PRINCIPALLY BY PHALANGE AND IT WOULD
BE RUNNING UNNECESSARY RISK TO LEAVE FROM THERE INSTEAD OF
SIDON OR TYRE.

2. THIS POINT MAY SEEM ACADEMIC, BUT DEPARTURE FROM BEIRUT
WOULD IMPLY THAT LEBANESE GOVERNMENT SOMEHOW COULD HAVE
PREVENTED IT. IT IS THEORETICALLY IN CONTROL OF THIS
PLACE, WHEREAS IT IS NOT IN CONTROL OF THE PORTS OF
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SIDON AND TYRE.

3. BOUTROS ASKED WHETHER WE HAD HAD ANY REACTION FROM
ISRAELIS TO DEMARCHE HE HAD MADE TO ME OVER TELEPHONE
SUNDAY NIGHT (REFTELS). I SAID WE HAD NOT BUT THAT I
HAD RECEIVED ASSURANCES FROM ATHERTON THAT DEPARTMENT
HAD OUR CONCERNS REGARDING RETALIATION AGAINST INNOCENT

PEOPLE VERY MUCH IN MIND. I THEN GAVE HIM FULL TEXT OF MARCH 13 PRESS BRIEFING.

4. BOUTROS SAID THAT HE DID NOT IMAGINE IT WAS REALISTIC FOR US TO ASK ISRAELIS NOT TO RETALIATE AGAINST PLO IN LEBANON. ISRAELIS WOULD FEEL COMPELLED TO DO WHAT THEY THOUGHT NECESSARY TO PROTECT THEIR SECURITY AND HE DID NOT IMAGINE WE COULD DISSUADE THEM. HE THOUGHT IT VERY IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, THAT THEIR RETALIATION NOT RESULT IN DEATH OF INNOCENT PEOPLE. GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON, OF COURSE, COULD NOT APPROVE OR ACCEPT ANY REPRISAL AGAINST ANYONE ON ITS TERRITORY, PALESTINIAN OR OTHERWISE. IT WAS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, THAT THE REPRISAL NOT BE DIRECTED AGAINST LEBANESE, WHO HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH TERRORIST OPERATION, AS PRIME MINISTER HOSS HAD ALREADY STATED PUBLICLY.

4. WE THEN HAD LONG AND SOMEWHAT GLOOMY DISCUSSION OF WHAT ONE MIGHT EXPECT FROM ISRAELIS IN THE WAY OF MILITARY ACTION. I SAID WE COULD SPECULATE ALL WE LIKED, BUT ISRAELIS WOULD SEEK TO DO THE UNEXPECTED AND WOULD AVOID TELEGRAPHING THEIR INTENTIONS. AT THIS POINT ONE OF BOUTROS' SUBORDINATES CAME IN WITH AFP TICKER REPORT THAT DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTE OF PALESTINIAN STUDIES HAD SAID ISRAEL PLANNING TO OCCUPY

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LEBANON SOUTH OF LITANI IN ORDER PUT PRESSURE ON SYRIANS TO WITHDRAW FROM LEBANON. SPECULATION THAT ISRAELIS WILL OCCUPY PART OF LEBANESE TERRITORY IS RIFE, OF COURSE, AND AFP REPORT IS BUT ONE SAMPLE OF THIS. BOUTROS SAID IF ISRAEL OCCUPIED ANY PART OF SOUTH LEBANON IT WOULD BE VERY EMBARRASSING TO ALL OF US. EVEN IF IT WERE ONLY A TEMPORARY OCCUPATION, LEBANON WOULD HAVE TO PROTEST AND WOULD CALL UPON US TO HONOR ITS COMMITMENT TO LEBANON'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND TO PUT PRESSURE ON ISRAEL TO WITHDRAW. FOR US NOT TO RESPOND POSITIVELY TO SUCH A DEMARCHE WOULD SERIOUSLY AFFECT OUR CREDIBILITY IN AREA. EVEN IF WE RESPONDED POSITIVELY, QUESTION WOULD ALSO BE POSED AS TO WHETHER IN FACT WE COULD GET ISRAELIS TO WITHDRAW. HE HOPED WE WOULD NOT BE FACED WITH THIS DILEMMA.

5. HE THEN ASKED IF IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR US TO GET COMMITMENT FROM ISRAELIS THAT THEY WOULD RESPECT LEBANESE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND SOVEREIGNTY. I SAID I WOULD UNDERTAKE TO TRANSMIT HIS REQUEST BUT COULD GIVE NO ASSURANCES IN THIS REGARD.

6. ON LEAVING MINISTRY I WAS SURROUNDED BY PRESS AND TV CORRESPONDENTS, WHO ASKED NUMBER OF QUESTIONS. I CONFINED MYSELF TO SAYING WE WERE IN CONSTANT TOUCH WITH THE PARTIES CONCERNED AND THAT THE ONLY OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON QUESTION WAS THAT MADE BY DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN ON MARCH 13. BOUTROS INDICATED THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO GIVE SOMEWHAT LONGER STATEMENT AND WOULD TELL PRESS HE HAD MADE DEMARCHE TO US WITH REGARD TO QUESTION OF ISRAELI REPRISAL AND THAT HE HAD NOT YET RECEIVED OUR RESPONSE.

7. ACTION REQUESTED: PRESUME WE HAVE ALREADY CONVEYED LEBANESE CONCERNS TO ISRAELIS, AND THAT THEY ARE KEEPING THEIR OWN COUNSEL. I HOPE, HOWEVER, THAT
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IT WILL BE POSSIBLE FOR US TO REGISTER WITH ISRAELIS OUR OWN CONCERN FOR LEBANESE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND THAT WE CAN GET SOME REITERATION FROM THEM OF THEIR PREVIOUS POSITION THAT THEY HAVE NO DESIGNS ON LEBANON. WE OF COURSE DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY HAVE IN MIND DOING AS REPRISAL, BUT FULLY SHARE BOUTROS' VIEW THAT IF THEY DO TAKE THIS OCCASION TO OCCUPY ALL OR PART OF SOUTH LEBANON, IT IS GOING TO CONFRONT US WITH A VERY EMBARRASSING PROBLEM, WITHOUT SOLVING THEIR SECURITY PROBLEM. THEY WILL MERELY PUSH THE PALESTINIANS FURTHER NORTH, TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE RIST OF LEBANON.
PARKER

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